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# Virginia is fertile ground for Russian secret agents

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Masquerading as electronics consultants, teams of FBI agents were uneasy one fall day four years ago as they set up surveillance at inconspicuous rural spots east of Fredericksburg. Their target: a suspected Soviet spy bearing secrets from a sensitive Navy research facility at nearby Dahlgren.

The spots, called "dead drops" in spy lexicon, were useful only because they were ordinary. "They'd be a place you could stop, take a break from a trip, check your tires or something and not arouse suspicion — picnic areas, small stores, gas stations . . .," said James Nolan, the FBI agent who supervised the operation.

So began another chessboard episode of espionage in the Old Dominion. Spying in the state and nation has intensified in recent years, especially because of the progress the United States has made in defense-related electronics and computer technology, according to the FBI and others close to American counterintelligence.

The informant who led the FBI to King George County's piney countryside was a good one — Rudolph Herrmann, a colonel in the world's largest intelligence service, the Soviet KGB.

The KGB didn't know that Herrmann had been caught and "turned" by the FBI. When the KGB's Moscow Center radioed Herrmann at his New York home with orders to drive to Virginia and find several dead drops near Dahlgren, the FBI told Herrmann to comply.

Herrmann sent Moscow detailed instructions about the drops which another spy would use to hide Dahlgren's secrets. The KGB wanted Herrmann to retrieve the documents and get them to Russia. Meanwhile, the FBI waited in the woods.

There was reason for the FBI to be restless. At Dahlgren is the Naval Surface Weapons Center, a prime repository for top secret weapons research projects. They range from the guidance system of the submarine-launched Trident missile to the nuclear warhead design of the Tomahawk cruise missile to crucial combat electronics and computer systems.

Research centers like Dahlgren have been responsible for many of this country's major weaponry advances, particularly in the what is called electronics countermeasures.

The importance of these advances was underscored in the past five months during the Falklands Islands war and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The Soviet Union, for example, was seriously embarrassed in June by how easily the Israelis knocked out advanced anti-aircraft missiles it had sold to Syria. The Israeli jets were guided by computerized, American-built electronics which fooled and blinded Syrians using Soviet-built equipment.

Communist Bloc agents have become more energetic since the Carter administration restricted technical information available to the Russians after their invasion of Afghanistan, intelligence officials said. "As what can be obtained legally or lawfully decreases, Soviet intelligence operations increase," said Nolan of the FBI.

## Anything useful to the Soviet Union

"Technology . . . is a major target . . .," said a member of the Intelligence Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives who asked not to be identified, " . . . anything useful to the military buildup of the Soviet Union."

In Virginia, there's plenty useful to the Soviet Union. The state is dotted with potential espionage targets from the Pentagon, Central Intelligence Agency, and various defense consulting firms in the north to the sprawl of naval and Air Force installations in Tidewater to remote research facilities like the one in Dahlgren. Each has its share of advanced technology along with other tempting secrets.

The state has long been a favorite meeting ground for agents and their handlers working out of Communist Bloc embassies in Washington.

"Washington is like a fishbowl," said Harry Rositzke, a retired CIA operations officer who has written a book about the KGB. "The last place he'd [a Soviet intelligence officer] want to meet would be Washington. All those FBI agents and intelligence agents. Northern Virginia is a much safer 'alternative.'"

Even the famed Soviet master spy, H.A.R. "Kim" Philby, who ostensibly worked for the British Secret Service in Washington in the early 1950s while handing over many American secrets to the Russians, made use of Northern Virginia to drop off documents and meet with KGB officers, Rositzke said.

But Rositzke was skeptical about whether there really are more covert Soviet espionage operations in this country. "That's [President] Reagan's FBI," he said, noting that the Reagan administration has a campaign going to make the public aware of the possibilities of foreign spying. "The Russians are coming has long been a Reagan theme," he said, although he pointed out that more Soviet and East European diplomats are moving around the country than before.

Indeed, some foreign intelligence operations in the state had none of the cloak and dagger flair of James Bond or even the Dahlgren episode. Communist Bloc agents openly pursue unclassified information about American technology and admit their identities when caught. When it comes to unclassified material, "the KGB isn't shy," Nolan noted.

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